STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

The Albany Bulb: Home Is Where the Heart Is

by Amber Whitson

When we lived on the Albany Bulb, we all had problems. All people have problems, no matter where they live. Some people have problems that are more serious in nature than others.

Some of the most serious problems in this world include: hunger, violence, poverty and a lack of a place where people can feel confident in their ability to continue to call home. These are problems that many of us did not have — that is, until the last year and a half that our community existed on the Albany Bulb.

Right up until the moment that each of us were forcibly evicted from the Albany Bulb, we had Homes. They were not our "legal" homes. But they were the homes where many of us were healthier than we had ever been at any other time in our lives.

When we lived on the Bulb, we were happy. Life wasn't "perfect" for any of us. But that had nothing to do with where we were living. Nobody's life is perfect, no matter where they live. That is life.

Politicians and their "sheeple" pontificated about our "needs." A need for "case management." A need for housing. A need for "life skills" training. A need for sobriety from whatever we each self-medicated with. A need to need.

"Protest Grid." **Albany Bulb residents carried these signs protesting their eviction to Albany City Hall.** Image by Robin Lasser

Life Before Eviction

While we lived on the Bulb, we never fell asleep to the sound of nearby gunfire.

Members of our community who had always been at odds with each other were not forced to dwell in cramped quarters together, in order to live free from fear of police harassment.

We enjoyed the "luxury" of being able to afford to buy groceries.

Many of us had more positive interactions (far more interactions, in general) with other members of society.

We were in better shape (riding our bikes to and from town).

We were in better health, eating healthier food and breathing healthier air, with our minds more at peace.

After the mass eviction of people from the Albany Bulb, as a result of the assistance we received, some of us were housed in the poorest areas of Richmond

See **Home Is Where the Heart Is** *page 11*

Report Finds State's Vagrancy Laws Violate Rights

by Janny Castillo

"We can't arrest our way out of homelessness." — Eric Ares, Los Angeles Community Action Network

What would make 13 elders from St. Mary's Center, ages 55 to 90, and a Presentation Sister pile into cars at 8:00 a.m. in the morning and drive 80 miles to foggy Sacramento? Their fierce commitment to urge California legislators to support the Right to Rest Act of the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP).

On February 19, St. Mary's Center Senior Advocates for Hope and Justice joined other advocates, some from as far away as Los Angeles, to share their personal stories of the consequences of being cited and arrested for sitting, lying and sleeping. They described how cities use "broken windows" policing to target homeless people and criminalize their innocent, life-sustaining activities.

Due to decades of national and state cuts to affordable housing, chronic homelessness has plagued California cities. Common sense would demand that affordable housing is the solution to homelessness, rather than criminalizing the very people we want to help.

See **California's Vagrancy Laws** *page 10*

At the State Capitol, the UC Policy Advocacy Clinic released a report on the rising criminalization of homeless people in California by the use of laws that mimic shameful vagrancy laws and discriminatory edicts of past eras. Photo credit: Janny Castillo

John Lewis and the Spirit of Selma

"I thought I was going to die on that bridge. I thought it was the last nonviolent protest. But somehow I survived, and a group of nuns took care of us at a hospital."

— John Lewis, beaten by Alabama police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma.

The cover art from *March: Book Two* shows the burning of the Freedom Riders' bus by a mob that then assaulted the Riders.

by Terry Messman

It has now been 50 years since "Bloody Sunday" in Selma, Alabama, when John Lewis and Hosea Williams led some 600 civil rights marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965.

The demonstrators attempted to peacefully march from Selma to Montgomery in support of voting rights, but state and local police viciously attacked the nonviolent procession, brutally beating them with whips and clubs, firing tear gas and charging the defenseless marchers on horseback. Hundreds of people suffered bloody beatings and some were clubbed nearly to death.

Fifty years have passed and yet Rep. John Lewis remains just as strongly committed to the Freedom Movement's vision of nonviolent social change, just as dedicated to building a world based on its values of love, peace and human rights.

On February 18, 2015, 50 years after Selma, Lewis spoke to a gathering in San Francisco and vividly recalled the moment when the marchers first encountered Alabama state troopers and local police on the bridge.

"We got to the highest point on the Edmund Pettus Bridge," Lewis said, "and down below we saw a sea of blue — Alabama's state troopers. And behind the state troopers we saw the sheriff's posse on horseback."

Major John Cloud told the civil rights marchers they were conducting an unlawful march, and when Hosea Williams asked him for a moment to pray, the major said, "Troopers advance!"

Lewis soberly described what happened next, in the first moments of the police attack before he lost consciousness.

"You saw these men putting on their gas masks," he said. "They came towards us, beating us with night sticks, trampling us with horses and releasing the tear gas. I was hit on the head by a state trooper with a night stick. My legs went out from under me. I fell to the ground.

The Last Nonviolent Protest

"Apparently, I lost consciousness. The doctor said I had a concussion. I thought I was going to die on that bridge. I thought it was the last nonviolent protest. But somehow I survived. And a group of nuns took care of us at a local hospital."

This police assault on the Selma marchers is also brought back to life in the first pages of *March: Book One*, a graphic novel by John Lewis, co-author Andrew Aydin and artist Nate Powell that offers a highly personal, eyewitness account of the civil rights movement.

When Lewis was a young man, he was greatly influenced by a widely distributed comic book, "Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story," a pictorial history of the Montgomery bus boycott published by the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

The comic book influenced Rep. Lewis to work with Congressional Aide Andrew Aydin to create a trilogy of graphic novels about the Selma marches and the entire Freedom Movement of the 1960s. *March: Book One* is a #1 New York Times Bestseller and the first graphic novel to win a Robert F. Kennedy Book Award.

Even though it has been 50 years since the march on Bloody Sunday, the story and lessons of Selma have perhaps never been more timely and meaningful. Fifty-year anniversary events are being held in honor of this turning point in the struggle to win voting rights. The excellent movie, "Selma," is telling the history of the struggle for a new generation. Also, the nationwide protests of the police killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner are a reminder that social-change movements are needed more than ever.

Rep. Lewis spoke about his experiences in the civil rights movement at the San Francisco Public Library on February 18, just three days before his 75th birthday. Lewis was a 25-year-old firebrand activist when he delivered his brilliant, outspoken speech at the massive March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, a speech that was so uncompromising in its militant demands for justice and freedom that march organizers pleaded with him to tone it down.

Fifty years later, in his speech in San Francisco, the 75-year-old Lewis proved to be an extraordinarily eloquent and inspiring teacher in conveying the lifelong lessons in nonviolence he learned during Nashville sit-ins, Freedom Rides in Alabama, Mississippi Freedom Summer, and during the Selma marches.

But Lewis is much greater — much deeper — than merely a skilled orator. He speaks in a modest, somewhat unassuming way, without overly dramatic flourishes, yet he connects with people at a very profound level, because he speaks from some deeply thoughtful place within. His stories about nonviolent resistance to racism and oppression land with eye-opening impact.

Both in his public speeches and in the pages of his graphic novels, his storytelling is so vivid and realistic that he is able to make his listeners really *feel* the life-and-death stakes of the struggle for freedom that fell on the shoulders of very young activists in the 1960s.

As a young man, Lewis was often on the radical, cutting edge of nonviolent resistance. Today, he is one of the nation's most powerful voices for the values of nonviolence, love, peace and justice.

Child of Sharecroppers

John Lewis was born on Feb. 21, 1940, on a small farm near the tiny town of Troy, Alabama. His parents were sharecroppers who finally were able to buy their land and raised hogs, peanuts, cows, cotton, corn — and chickens. In his speech in San Francisco, Lewis recalled those days with affection, especially his childhood years of raising chickens. Lewis was too tenderhearted to cooperate in selling his chickens or letting them be killed for food, preferring instead to preach to his barnyard congregation of chickens. I couldn't help but recall St. Francis preaching to the birds.

John Lewis joins a sit-in at a Nashville lunch counter. March: Book One, cover art, detail

As a child, when his family visited the towns of Montgomery, Tuskegee and Birmingham, Alabama, Lewis noticed the signs that said, "White Men, Colored Men, White Women, Colored Women."

Getting into necessary trouble

At the movie theaters, he said, all the little black children would go upstairs to the balcony and all the little white children went downstairs to the first floor.

Lewis said, "I would ask my parents and grandparents, 'Why?' They would say, 'Well, that's the way it is. Don't get in the way. Don't get in trouble.'"

In 1955, when Lewis was 15 and in high school, he heard about the arrest of Rosa Parks because she refused to go to the back of the bus. "The action of Rosa Parks and the leadership and words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired me to find a way to get in the way, and to get into trouble," Lewis said. "And I got into trouble — necessary trouble!"

Inspired by Dr. King and Rosa Parks, Lewis went to the Pike County Library in 1956 when he was 16, and tried to check out books. "The librarian told us that the library is only for whites and not for coloreds," he said.

"I never went back to the Pike County Pubic Library again until July 5, 1998, for a book signing for my first book, *Walking with the Wind*. Hundreds of black and white citizens showed up."

After a large reception and book signing, the library gave him a library card — 42 long years after the 16-year-old Lewis had been denied. "It says something about the distance we've come and the progress we've made in laying down the burden of race," Lewis said.

Lewis himself has come a long way from that small farm in Alabama. He was elected to the House of Representatives in Georgia's 5th District in 1986. Today, he is one of the most progressive members of Congress, speaking out for national health insurance, gay rights and measures to fight poverty. He sponsored the Peace Tax Fund Bill to give taxpayers a way to conscientiously object to military taxation, and he opposed NAFTA and the Clinton administration's attacks on welfare.

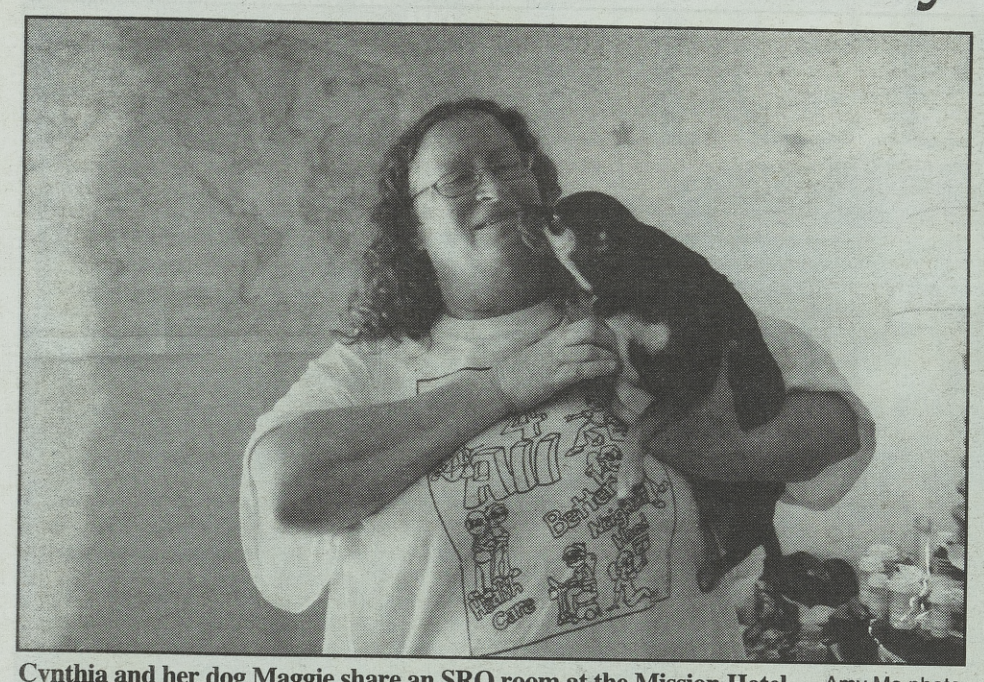
While the college-age Lewis was attending American Baptist Theological Seminary and Fisk University in Nashville, students from several colleges began attending nonviolence workshops conducted by Jim Lawson. Lawson "had lived in India and studied the way of peace, the way of love, the way of nonviolence," Lewis said.

Along with strategy sessions and role-playing, Lewis said, "we became imbued with the way of peace, with the way of love, with the way of nonviolence. Many of us started accepting the way of nonviolence as a way of life, a way of living."

That all sounds very lofty and utopian. Yet, these very young men and women began putting the ideals of love and peace into action in a climate of extreme violence and racial intolerance. They had to find the strength to endure the hatred directed at their nonviolent protests by thousands of white people who defended the system of segregation with acts of brutality and bloodshed.

See **John Lewis and the Spirit** *page 7*

An SRO Hotel Is Hardly a Home in San Francisco



Cynthia and her dog Maggie share an SRO room at the Mission Hotel. Amy Ma photo

Andrea lives in a tiny, cramped room in the Phillips Hotel. Alexander Wong photo

Documentary film by UCB student exposes degrading conditions and overcrowding in SRO hotels.

by TJ Johnston

Families living in 8-by-10-feet rooms. Drug dealing in the hallways. Vermin crawling in the rooms. Managers threatening tenants and visitors.

Such conditions in the single-room-occupancy (SRO) hotels that house upwards of 30,000 people in San Francisco scarcely make these abodes welcoming.

"Hardly Home: Stories from San Francisco's SROs" is a short documentary directed by Samantha Lew, a student at the University of California at Berkeley and former intern at the Coalition on Homelessness. The film is based on Lew's interviews with SRO residents, which were published in a series of stories in the *Street Sheet* last year.

The film has been released online with a report by the SRO Families United Collaborative to follow in March.

Estimates of the SRO hotel population in San Francisco appear to be fluid. In 2009, the city's Planning Department said that 18,500 people dwell in hotels, while the Central City SRO Collaborative places the number at more than 30,000.

Housing of Last Resort

SROs often provide housing of last resort for low-income people and are meant to serve as a haven for families, people struggling with addiction and mental health diagnoses, domestic violence victims, immigrants and the elderly. That is the purpose of these hotels, at least in theory.

The reality is that SRO hotels, which average 30 to 40 rooms per building, are overcrowded, unsanitary and dangerous. In San Francisco, such hotels are concentrated in the Tenderloin, South of Market, Mission and Chinatown neighborhoods.

Although the city administers some hotels through nonprofit organizations, privately run SROs predominate. In 2009, the last year figures were available, the Department of Building Inspection found 418 private hotels, in contrast with 87 publicly operated ones.

Before filming, Lew, a San Francisco native studying public health at UC Berkeley, already had heard stories of couples and families living in cramped quarters, yet shooting her film in the hotels threw a new light on the SRO experience.

"Being in the space itself illustrated just how difficult it was to live in such a place," she said. "I was also surprised by the variability between each SRO I visited. Some were nicer than others. Some had very different procedures to enter the buildings, and others seem like anyone could come and go."

"There really is no uniformity between SROs, and each seemed to have its own culture and reputation," Lew added.

One resident experienced a change in atmosphere from her previous hotel. Now living at the Mission Hotel, Cynthia's lot in life somewhat improved when she moved from the Civic Center Hotel — with its open-air drug trade and use in the corridors and lack of separate-gender bathrooms — once the county welfare program offered her current room.

Her room at the Mission Hotel is adorned with a map of the world, a street sign reading "Dead Head Way" and a list of movies she wants to see. On her nightstand are framed certificates from the Mission SRO Collaborative and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in recognition of her tenant advocacy. Maggie, her Chihuahua, lives with her to relieve symptoms of anxiety, post-traumatic disorder and depression. Occasionally, cockroaches crawl in her unit, but it hasn't been infested with bedbugs, an all-too-common plague in SROs.

However, Cynthia notes the lack of a "housing ladder" when the city tries to secure or create living spaces for poor people. "I have no chance to move up when they build affordable housing," she said. "They only want to move in homeless people. There should be a step-up program for one of those studio apartments they're building, but I can't because I'm not homeless any more."

'Worse Than Prison'

When Lew visited the Phillips Hotel in South of Market to interview Andrea, she and her crew experienced harassment and intimidation from the managers, Ashok and Ricky Patel, who tried to prevent their entry. Ricky Patel brandished a ridged, metal rod. Lew had to call the police for assistance while Andrea was forced into an altercation with the Patels. Eventually, they were allowed to enter Andrea's room.

Alexander Wong, Lew's camera operator, noted the dangers tenants experience. "The hazards presented by SROs to the tenants' mental and physical health are staggering and immediate," he said.

The police are called in at least twice a week, Lew said. "The Patels constantly harass tenants, physically and psychologically, transforming the Phillips Hotel into what several of the tenants described as a prison."

Psychological experts would even consider these tactics as a form of torture: loud noises and construction work at 3 or 4 a.m., constant berating with racial slurs and creation of health hazards.

Even the Patels' ownership of the Phillips Hotel is in question. Tenants accuse them of fraudulently acquiring the hotel and pocketing rent money. Some have stopped paying.

Desiree, another Phillips resident who requested her face not be shown, had to be prescribed antidepressants. "It's worse than prison," she said. "At least in prison, they don't treat you so bad." When she reported the conditions to the city, the Patels retaliated by cranking up the heat and locking the bathrooms.

"He wants to strip you of your pride, your character and dignity," she said of Ricky. "I told him you can't have it."

Families in Cramped Rooms

While the "S" in SRO stands for "single," families are often housed in 8-by-10 or 10-by-12-feet spaces. This is definitely the case with Jun, a native of Guangzhou, China. He lives with his wife, Winnie, and their two children, now ages 10 and 1, in one of the 145 SRO hotels — about one-third the city's total — that dot Chinatown.

Jun works as a janitor at Self Help for the Elderly, a community organization serving the Chinese community, while Winnie studies hairstyling. SROs act as entry points for newcomers to the country, yet the living arrangements add to the challenges immigrants already face.

"I thought it would be a little bit better [than in China], but I never thought it would be like this," he said in Cantonese, noting the lack of amenities in each room. "Living here is a lot different from China. There's no bathroom. There's no kitchen. You have to wait in line in order to use the kitchen."

His janitor's wages can barely cover the $760 per month that pay for a 10-by-10-feet room furnished with a small metal sink, a couple of stovetops, a double bed and a bunk bed. For now, moving to a space where Jun's children would have more room to play isn't an option, certainly when the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom in the city is approaching $4,000.

"Coming here, you expect the conditions to be better than in China. When you say the U.S. doesn't have housing problems, that's not true."

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Watch "Hardly Home: Stories From *San Francisco's SROs," online at* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PznBYNCdMY0

Street Spirit

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Editor, Layout: Terry Messman
Web manager: Jesse Clarke
Human rights editor: Carol Denney

Contributors: Barbara Boissevain, Janny Castillo, Carol Denney, Lydia Gans, Elena Gross, TJ Johnston, Leon Kennedy, Robin Lasser, Amy Ma, South Florida Food Not Bombs, Alexander Wang, Amber Whitson

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Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, artwork, poems and photos.
***Contact*: Terry Messman**
Street Spirit, 65 Ninth Street, San Francisco, CA 94103
***E-mail*: spirit@afsc.org**
***Web:* http://www.thestreetspirit.org**

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The Sense of Loss When a Community Is Erased

by Elena Gross

We've all played that game where you ask someone: If your house was suddenly destroyed, what is the one thing you would try to save? The answer is often incredibly revealing of the kinds of things — objects, memories, or beings — the person holds sacred.

But, for many of us, the comfort of the game is that we have never been forced to make that decision, or robbed of the chance to do so. The exhibition "Refuge in Refuse: Homesteading Art & Culture Project" at SOMArts Cultural Center in San Francisco, is as much about honoring the importance and fragility of home, and the many ways one can come to define it, as it is about showcasing the truly remarkable artwork of local artists and residents of the Albany Bulb.

"Refuge in Refuse" is one of three shows this year that comprise SOMArts' Commons Curatorial Residency Program. Bay Area residents, artists, curators and activists are encouraged to submit proposals for an exhibition that highlights the Bay Area's "many dimensions of diversity including race, class, cultural heritage, artistic expression, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation."

The SOMArts Commons Curatorial Residency recipients, Robin Lasser, Danielle Siembieda, and Barbara Boissevain, have chosen to open the floor for a population often talked about but far less frequently heard. The former residents of the Albany Bulb, or as many self-identify, The Landfillians, have collaborated with Bay Area artists, architects, scholars, and writers to express themselves and tell their stories with unsentimental honesty and integrity.

The exhibit presents a multifocal and complicated view of life at the Albany Bulb before and after the most recent mass-eviction last spring, which was the first step in an effort to banish the now-homeless residents and convert the land into public park space.

Like the social infrastructure of the Albany Bulb itself, much of the work in the exhibition is the result of careful collaboration. Many hands came together to make this show possible, and many perspectives are on display at once.

Photographers and documentarians meet with sculptors and landscape architects; beaded mobiles and paintings done on salvaged metal meet with 3D renderings and interventionist park signs.

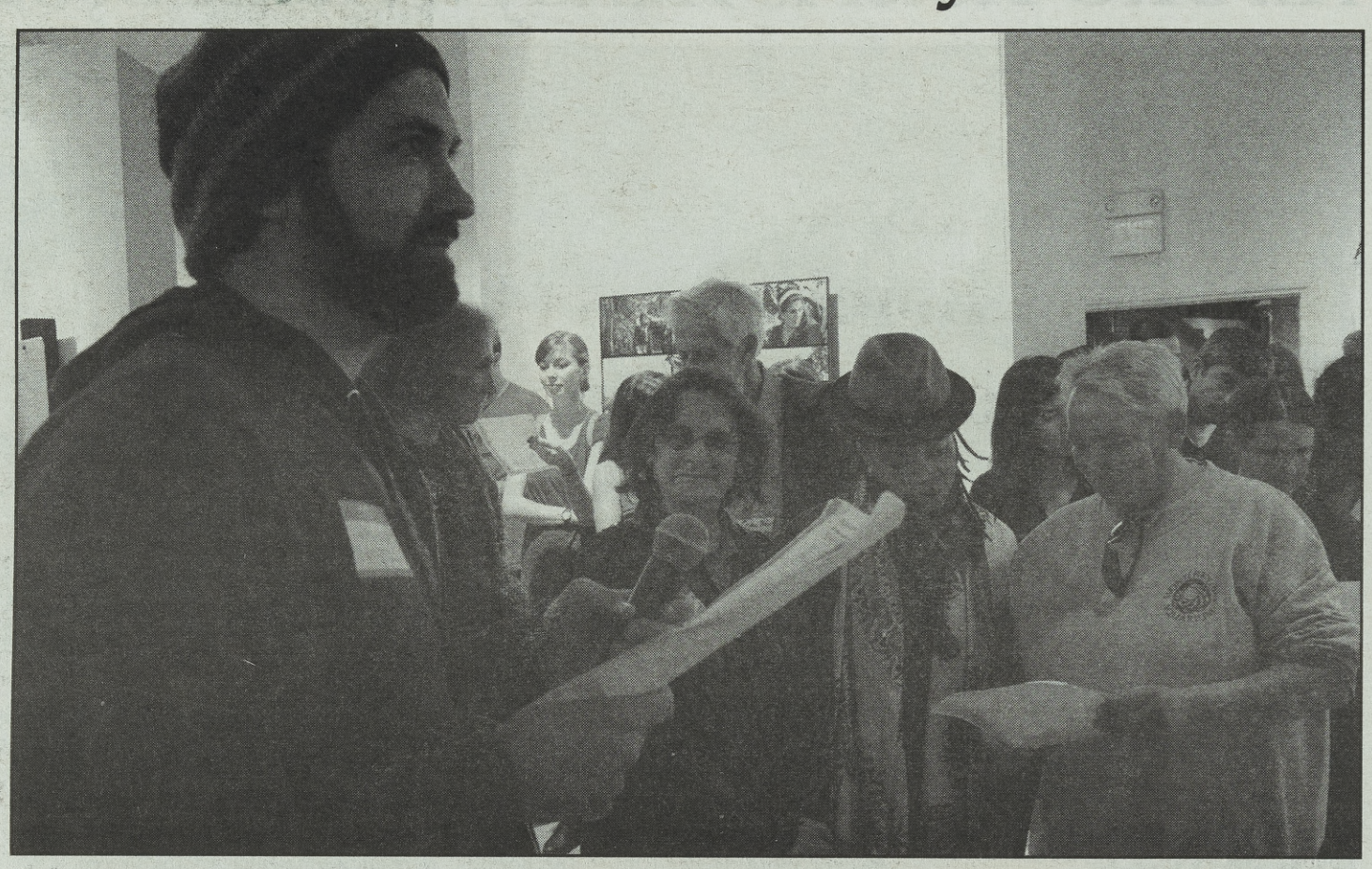
The delicate ecology of people, plants, animals and artwork that all coexisted on the Albany Bulb are given equal footing and thoughtful consideration. "Refuge in Refuse" really uncovers what this place has meant — and still means — to many different people.

Though there is something innately political about the work in "Refuge in Refuse," there is also a strong emotive quality, and this was never more visible than in witnessing the artists react to seeing their own work on display, some of them for the first time.

"It's beautiful," said artist Danielle Evans as she gazed admiringly at her own paintings. "It's like 'that's not me!' But it is!"

Her work is displayed beside Jimbow the Hobow's brilliantly titled paintings, such as "Dancing Landfillians," and metal photo-collage mandala portraits of residents like Tamara, who performed her own rendition of Elphaba the Wicked Witch of the West, melting outside the window of Mad Marc's Castle, a joint collaboration between Tamara, Robin Lasser and sculptor Judith Leinen.

The artworks reveal glimpses into the lives of these individuals and allow you, for a minute, to see The Landfillians as they see themselves. Those of us in positions of privilege may come to a show like "Refuge in Refuse" with preconceived notions about what being "homeless" looks like, or what homelessness is, or who homeless people are.



Andy Kreamer, a former resident of the Albany Bulb, made the film, "Where Do You Go When It Rains?" At the exhibition, he asked people to call out the names of Albany Bulb residents who had been lost. The amount of loss that has been suffered in the past year, both physically and mentally, is overwhelming. The residents have lost more than their homes. They've lost their safety, their friends, their peace of mind.

But so rarely do we take a minute to let those on whom we've already passed judgement — good, bad or otherwise — speak for themselves. "We would work with the residents out there and talk to them about their stories. And people like Tamara or Boxer Bob really created their own lives for the camera," Lasser said of her collaboration with residents to make the film "Refuge in Refuse."

Though mediums in this exhibition range from the collection of found objects (or "nifties" as they are referred to in the piece by Amber Whitson) to contemporary scan technology, the most prolific and varied is perhaps the use of film. In addition to the large-scale photographs and zoetrope mandalas, there are three documentary films working in conjunction with the exhibition.

On opening night of the exhibition, SOMArts screened all three films back-to-back, including post-film discussions and talks by the artists. The three films are "Bum's Paradise," "Where Do You Go When It Rains," and "Refuge in Refuse," all collaborative efforts by documentarians and Albany Bulb residents. They all played on loop in the gallery space during the exhibition. All three films are now available and can be viewed at any time on the Refuge in Refuse website, at www.refugeinrefuse.weebly.com as well as on Public Access TV. [See: http://www.somarts.org/refugecommons/]

The films take the viewer on a chronological walkthrough of the struggle between Bulb residents and Albany officials from the time of the first mass evictions in 1999 to the most recent evictions in April 2014. These screenings are particularly effective in reminding the audience that the lives and struggles of the Albany Bulb and the people who lived there did not end when the cameras stopped rolling, and will not end when the exhibition closes at SOMArts in March.

Seeing subjects of the film, like poet/artist Robert "Rabbit" Barringer or attorney/SNIFF artist Osha Neumann, stand before the projection screen after one of the films and address the crowd was an emotional and powerful experience, drawing many curious, impassioned and heated questions from the audience.

The question that most hung in the air: What happens now? What happens to the residents? To the artwork? To the Bulb? The artists of "Refuge in Refuse" are living proof that this struggle is still not over. There are lives still being affected and no good can come from ignoring that.

At the opening, Andy Kreamer, a former resident of the Bulb and the filmmaker of "Where Do You Go When It Rains," gave a very moving talk, asking for participants to call out the names of Bulb residents who had been lost. The weight of this action filled the room with a kind of reality not replicable on screen. The amount of loss that has been suffered in the past year, both physically and mentally, is unquantifiable. The residents have lost more than their homes. They've lost their safety, their friends, their peace of mind.

For some, their artwork still remains on the Bulb. However, it hardly feels like a victory. "Now that the people are gone, I personally have no interest in going back — or keeping the art there," Neumann said after the showing of "Bum's Paradise."

Though not a resident, Neumann is one of the artists in the SNIFF collective who worked on the Bulb and whose artwork is now a signature part of the landscape. Pieces of his sculptural work, as well as Mad Marc's Castle, are some of the only surviving remnants of the artistic community on the Bulb. The homes and encampments were destroyed in the eviction.

The "Refuge in Refuse" exhibition is not just about what survived, but also about what was lost. Probably the most surprising pieces in the show are the 3D point cloud images of the Bulb, made in October 2013 before the mass eviction by artists Danielle Siembieda and Robin Lasser in collaboration with F3 & Associates, a 3D printing firm in Benicia.

"I am a new media artist by trade, so technology is an important aspect in how I work," Siembieda said. "The site is very architectural and I knew it would be only moments before the buildings were gone. With other important historical landmarks, surveyors document every aspect of a building. Using 3D scan technology allows [us] to have accurate preservation of information."

During an upcoming event for "Refuge in Refuse," participants will access an "augmented reality tour" on the actual site of the Albany Bulb, allowing them to see the structures that existed on the land prior to demolition.

"This was the perfect setting for this type of work," Siembieda said. "The structures do not adhere to formal angular structures and are difficult to replicate. With a team of surveyors and the technology, we were able to access the California Coordinates (more precise than GPS coordinates) and the exact position each structure had taken."

The product of this work is striking. The scans on display as still images of the Bulb look like something out of a very colorful dream, with mansions and castles and metal sculptures. But like a dream, we are now left with harsh reality, fragmented memories and a longing to go back to sleep.

As Lasser said several times during my talk with her, "This show is not a solution." Refuge in Refuse is not a solution to the eviction and displacement of a large number of now-homeless human beings who created a community at the Albany Bulb that has been demolished.

Greg Kloehn's beautifully made mobile structures for the homeless, on view in the exhibition, are not a solution to homelessness. An augmented reality tour and park signs are not a solution to the erasure of marginalized histories of the Bulb. But it is a start.

What this exhibition, and the contributions of all the artists, community organizers and former residents, does offer, is a chance to reflect. It offers a chance to see the Landfillians as they are and as they want to be seen. And it enables us to see that a "homeless" or "houseless" or simply more ephemeral way of life is no less valid or less worthy of respect.

"Refuge in Refuse" presents the Albany Bulb in full complexity and living color and is committed to honoring the space, as it was, as it is and as it will be remembered by those therein invested.

The exhibition is still on view until March 14, 2015, at SOMArts Cultural Center, 934 Brannan St. San Francisco, CA, 94103. Gallery hours: Tuesday-Friday, 12-7 p.m. and Saturday 12-5 p.m. More info: www.somarts.org/refugeinrefuse.

Food Not Bombs Sues to Share Food in Florida

A Column on Human Rights

by Carol Denney

Food Not Bombs and the Southern Legal Counsel are asking the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida to strike down Fort Lauderdale's new ordinance criminalizing food sharing in a lawsuit asking for injunctive relief and damages.

The ordinance requires "written consent" from the City to share food in any public park or public sidewalk throughout Fort Lauderdale. It obligates those who share food to meet all state, county and city requirements for food service establishments, including the provision of "restroom facilities, portable toilets or other similar facilities," among many other requirements.

To hold their Friday gatherings in Stranahan Park, members of Food Not Bombs are required by the new ordinance to obtain a "conditional use permit" by filing an application with the planning and zoning board which is reviewed by a development review committee, followed by a 20-60 day delay until a public hearing by the planning and zoning board, which can be reviewed within 30 days by the City Commission.

This requirement would apply to each and every location where meals are served, including one-time temporary events. Groups now risk $500 fines and 60-day jail sentences unless they comply with these burdensome regulations.

"Usually zoning ordinances deal with development and private property," said Kirsten Clanton of the Southern Legal Counsel. "This ordinance doesn't make any distinction between public and private property and tries to regulate public space."

Clanton notes that separate from the ordinance itself is the issue of getting consent from the City as a part of park rules which "basically ban food distribution" without providing any mechanism for obtaining city permission. "It doesn't make any sense," Clanton said.

Food Not Bombs' food sharing is an intrinsic part of its political message, which states that society can "end hunger and poverty if our collective resources are redirected from the military and war." The simplicity of Food Not Bombs' name and mission has taken root worldwide. Its website lists over 500 chapters, suggesting that it is more likely that there are "over 1,000 chapters of Food Not Bombs active in over 60 countries in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia and New Zealand."

Food Not Bombs considers the sharing of food to be protected political expression, rather than charity, and shares vegan or vegetarian meals as part of the fundamental message of peace, unity, and opposition to war — the same message that is so clearly expressed in its name.

Fort Lauderdale argues that Food Not Bombs is an "Outdoor Food Distribution Center" under its newly revised definition and, as such, food distribution is prohibited without a permit. The new ordinance took effect October 31, 2014, but has not stopped weekly demonstrations by Fort Lauderdale Food Not Bombs despite police interference and arrests.

Fort Lauderdale's ordinance states that the provision of food as a social service has "serious objectionable characteristics" and that it "may result in adverse secondary effects on adjacent properties."

In addition, the City of Fort Lauderdale argues that "providing food on the street to homeless individuals is perpetuating homelessness." The estimated homeless population in Florida in 2012 was nearly 55,000, just behind California and New York's numbers. The willingness of city officials to criminalize and arrest those who share food with others in public places —including 90-year-old Arnold Abbott, a World War II veteran — has received widespread media attention.

The City of Fort Lauderdale defended its ordinance by relaxing the rules on feeding homeless people indoors in houses of worship and on private property, in an effort to steer food distribution away from public parks like Stranahan Park, a small 1.6 acres in the downtown center.

The media response to Fort Lauderdale's crackdown has been very negative, according to Clanton, who says that statewide the efforts to criminalize homelessness are "always a response to the visibility of homelessness in public spaces."

"It's business interests," she states. "It's an effort to sanitize public space, often for tourism and tourist dollars."

But Stranahan Park's central location makes it "a quintessential public forum," according to the Southern Legal Counsel's complaint, a perfect place for Food Not Bombs to illustrate publicly their political message through their food distribution, their written materials, and the Food Not Bombs banner with the logo by co-founder Keith McHenry, a purple hand holding a bright orange carrot.

Stranahan Park underwent some physical alterations from 2012 to the present. Ornamental foliage was added to previously grassy areas, and the park now sports black metallic fencing with gates locked during the hours the park is closed, which the complaint states were "part of a concerted effort by the City to move poor and homeless people out of the park."

Clanton says that part of the significance of Stranahan Park for Food Not Bombs is the city's efforts to crack down on homeless people who use the park.

"Homeless people have been pushed out of that area," she notes. "One of the ideas is reclaiming public space for the homeless and for political expression."

Food Not Bombs protests the city's homeless relocation effort. The complaint states that "access to public spaces is a right to be shared by all, not a privilege to be limited by the government to selected individuals."

Fort Lauderdale insists that its approach to homelessness is progressive, including "a 230 bed homeless assistance center for short-term stays," and a "Housing First policy," according to the *New York Times*.

But the ordinance which took effect last Halloween is giving Fort Lauderdale an uncomfortable amount of negative press as another in an effort by many cities nationwide to attempt to push homelessness, meal programs and advocacy out of sight and out of mind.

"Whose Park? Our Park! Stop the Assault on the Homeless."

Efforts to criminalize homelessness are "always a response to the visibility of homelessness in public spaces," said Kirsten Clanton of Southern Legal Counsel. "It's business interests. It's an effort to sanitize public space, often for tourism and tourist dollars."

Fort Lauderdale police have arrested Food Not Bombs and others who share food in public places, including 90-year-old Arnold Abbott, a World War II veteran.

Food-sharing is "inherently symbolic expression and conduct," states the complaint. "Sharing food with another person communicates messages of intimacy, affirms social ties, and communicates group solidarity ... Food is used by every human society on earth to communicate messages including the affirmation of social ties, the practice of religious beliefs, and the expression of national and ethnic identities. Food is used to reinforce messages of group solidarity and for a society to engage in ritual, ceremony, and celebration. Food has symbolic meaning because it is literally taken into the body and has associations of life, home, family, and health."

"I think a lot of cities look at these types of ordinances as a quick and easy response to homelessness in their community, but the press coverage was overwhelmingly negative," stated Clanton, adding that the holiday season created a peculiar backdrop for the city's crackdown.

"Ultimately it's an inefficient use of scarce resources. You have to think about the overwhelming amount of money they're spending on prosecuting people."

There's a photograph on the Internet of a man relaxing under a tree in Stranahan Park with a sign saying, "We Won't Stop Until the Last Belly Is Full." The park is a good setting for such a sentiment.

Frank Stranahan, for whom the park is named, is considered the founder of Fort Lauderdale for establishing the first banking service, post office, trading post, and ferry. He traded with native populations, noting in a statement in 1917 on the conditions of the Florida Seminoles before the Committee on Investigation of the Indian Service, House of Representatives, that the Indian camp a half mile away "had plenty of corn, Indian pumpkins, sweet potatoes, and Lima beans" and were "living in no want whatever at that time." He testified to the committee that "as fast as they clear a piece of hammock and work it two or three years, some white man comes along and takes it."

The land grab evident to Frank Stranahan 100 years ago isn't over in Fort Lauderdale. The nationwide struggle over people's right to share together on public common ground is well illustrated in Fort Lauderdale's effort to essentially handcuff the local Food Not Bombs chapter. The Southern Legal Counsel's response on behalf of Food Not Bombs will help determine, at least in the courts, whether we can still share a bowl of soup.

City Council Takes Action on Police Abuse—Finally

In response to police abuse of protesters in December, the Berkeley City Council votes for a moratorium on CS gas and wooden and rubber projectiles.

by Carol Denney

Protesters gathered at the Ferguson Police Department after Michael Brown was killed on August 9, 2014. In December 2014, the Berkeley police violently attacked demonstrators who were protesting this police killing. Photo credit: Jamelle Bouie

A unanimous Berkeley City Council took a tentative step toward curbing controversial police crowd-control techniques on Tuesday, February 10, in council chambers packed with dozens of people telling chilling stories of Berkeley police abuse during December's local protests over nationwide police killings of unarmed black citizens.

A temporary moratorium on the use of CS gas, wooden and rubber projectiles, and over-the-shoulder baton strikes proposed by Councilmember Jesse Arreguin passed unanimously. CS gas is more commonly called "tear gas," but Physicians for Human Rights considers that a "misnomer for a group of poisonous gases which, far from being innocuous, have serious acute and longer-term adverse effects on the health of significant numbers of those exposed."

The council also passed a motion to support vehicle and body-worn cameras by police, an investigation into December's protests by Berkeley's Police Review Commission, and a motion to support national demands from Ferguson Action, an organization working to address the militarization of police and specifically support communities of color primarily affected by policies such as racial profiling.

The public comment that night brought forth deeply troubling testimony from people whose efforts to nonviolently protest police killings of unarmed black citizens such as Michael Brown and Eric Garner were met with beatings, CS gas, projectiles shot directly into crowds.

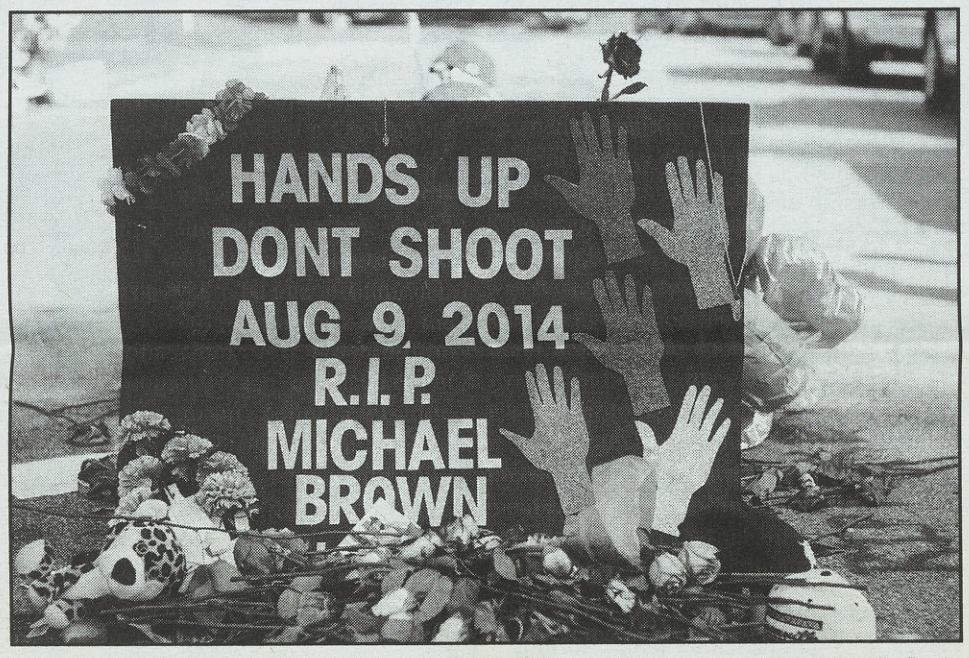
Many of those arrested were given no way to leave an area. People attempting to help injured, fallen individuals were also beaten, and emergency vehicles were prohibited from assisting.

Polly Armstrong, a former police review commissioner, former city councilmember, and current CEO of the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce, spoke in support of the police use of wooden and rubber projectiles, saying the police "need our support." Vice Chairman of the Chamber's Board Steven Donaldson also objected to the temporary moratorium, stating, "We do not need to disempower the police right now."

But Armstrong herself was one of the authors of a policy created when she was on the Police Review Commission in 1992 requiring the police to move a crowd only as quickly as they could reasonably walk. A video reveals that this policy was widely ignored by police in the December 2014 protests.

The rest of the public testimony was overwhelming in its support of a temporary moratorium. Moni Law, a 55-year-old African-American woman, testified that she was hit in the back with a baton and "had a flash grenade thrown" at her feet while trying to help another injured woman. "I was born in 1960 in Alabama," she said to the council, which was clearly moved by her words.

Students, bystanders, and protesters alike described trying repeatedly to show solidarity with nationwide protests over police abuse and being met by the Berkeley police with aggressive tactics, including CS gas, "less-than-lethal" projectiles shot into crowds, and "kettling" groups who were given no way to leave, caught between two police lines which would jab or beat them without any way to exit an area.



A memorial sign protests the police killing of Michael Brown. Photo: Jamelle Bouie

The Berkeley Police Department's general response to criticism of their tactics suggests that the vandalism and sporadic violence toward police officers made CS gas, projectiles, and baton strikes necessary. But testimony on February 10 included many people who tried to protect local stores from vandalism and did their utmost to keep the peace. Even police statements seem to agree that the troublemakers in the crowd were a small minority.

This is not the first time a temporary moratorium on chemical agents and projectiles has been proposed in Berkeley. In November of 1991, a similar proposal came before the council after well-documented cases of protest-related police misconduct in a meeting featuring "skunk oil." That night, a protester ran onto the Berkeley Community Theater's stage and poured a noxious liquid onto some of the councilmembers to convey her disapproval and was one of several arrests.

(I was also arrested that night; then Berkeley Chief of Police Dash Butler and then City Manager Michael Brown both claimed that I had committed an assault on the Chief. Both men lost their jobs, and I was acquitted, when Channel 7 news footage revealed that I had been peacefully standing still, waiting for my opportunity to speak when I was tackled from behind by police officers who inexplicably dragged me from the Berkeley Community Theater to jail.)

The 1991 moratorium proposal never got the votes it needed. But on February 10, 2015, supported in part by the undeniable and well-documented experiences of, among others, Berkeley Rep patrons and passers-by who had to contend with clouds of CS gas drifting into parking structures as part of their holiday experience in Berkeley, the vote for the police reform was unanimous.

The long wait for these proposals, originally scheduled for December, was frustrating for many who had come to repeated meetings only to be met with inaction, especially those primarily at risk.

Even the FBI's self-reported data reveal that a white police officer killed a black person nearly two times a week during a seven-year period ending in 2012, which most people agree is a severely underreported statistic. But the coalition of student and civil rights groups which pressured the council seems well aware that this moratorium is only a modest beginning.

Communities whose police forces have body cameras, for instance, end up with hours of footage and no particular expertise in storing and sorting them, often confounded by public records act requests for footage. The Police Review Commission

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Don't Call It Tear Gas

by Carol Denney

"We believe 'tear gas' is a misnomer for a group of poisonous gases which, far from being innocuous, have serious acute and longer-term adverse effects on the health of significant numbers of those exposed."

Physicians for Human Rights wrote the above paragraph after studying the health effects of chemical agents commonly known as tear gas after the government of the Republic of Korea admitted using 351,000 canisters against civilians in 1987. Physicians for Human Rights worked to "bring the skills and influence of the American medical community to the defense of international human rights."

Under the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1997, CS gas was banned from use as a method of warfare because it is capable of causing long-term incapacitation and even death, but it continues to be used by law enforcement for riot control, as Berkeley residents witnessed during the December 2014 protests of police killings around the nation.

The police claim the use of chemical agents was necessary because of projectiles thrown at them, if press reports are accurate. The hurling of rocks and bottles at anyone is an outrage, to be sure. It is also a criminal act, and most of us have seen that an extremely small group of two or three individuals uses the cover of a larger crowd to throw objects. The larger, peaceful crowd is as much at risk as the police officers.

Responding with CS gas which blinds, terrorizes, and in some cases incapacitates the entire crowd, rather than the individuals responsible for throwing objects, is an absurd, logic-free police response. The object-throwing individuals are usually furthest away, least liable to be affected by the chemical agents, and the haze in the street further obscures their movements and identities. The peaceful crowd is liable to get hurt trying to find a way out of the toxic air.

Our community has work to do to ensure that we as a community can safely express our outrage at the injustice of racism, which falls primarily on people of color. We need to demand that our police force be required to respect those rights, which are precious.

John Lewis and the Spirit of Selma

from page 2

That is why another great figure in the history of nonviolence, Dorothy Day, often quoted Dostoyevsky: "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams."

In his recent speech in San Francisco, Lewis described the sit-ins of the Nashville Student Movement when college students risked their lives in an effort to integrate lunch counters, restaurants and movie theaters.

"You'd be sitting there in an orderly, peaceful, nonviolent fashion waiting to be served," Lewis said, "and someone would come up and spit on you, or put a lighted cigarette out in your hair or down your back, or pour hot coffee on us, or pull us off the lunch counter stool. You'd just look straight ahead."

Neither threats nor beatings nor jail could shake their commitment to freedom for their people. Lewis had just turned 20 the week before he was first arrested.

"The first time I was arrested was in February 27, 1960," he said. "I felt liberated. I felt like I'd crossed over. So I said to myself, 'Arrest us, jail us, beat us, what else can you do?' We started singing, 'I'm not afraid of your jail.'"

THE LAST SUPPER

His next trial by fire was on an interstate bus trip through the Deep South. Lewis was one of the first Freedom Riders, an integrated group of black and white activists who boarded a Greyhound and a Trailways bus in Washington, D.C., in an attempt to pressure the U.S. government to uphold the 1960 Supreme Court decision that had declared segregated interstate bus travel to be unconstitutional.

On May 3, 1961, the night before the first Freedom Riders left Washington, D.C., the group of 13 activists gathered at a Chinese restaurant. John Lewis, the young man from Troy, Alabama, had never been to a Chinese restaurant before in his life. "It was wonderful," he said.

In the middle of the "wonderful meal," a member of their group reminded them all of the life-and-death nature of their mission. He said, "As you eat, remember this may be like the Last Supper."

This meal is compellingly portrayed in *March: Book Two*, with a full page showing the names and faces of each of the Freedom Riders. After the Last Supper remark, Lewis wrote, "We all knew what he said was true — the wills we'd signed that week served as testament."

The next day, May 4, 1961, members of the group boarded the two buses and left Washington, D.C., to travel through the South as an integrated group.

Lewis was literally floored by an attack that took place a few days later in Rock Hill, South Carolina, when he and his seatmate, a white man named Albert Bigelow, "tried to enter a so-called white waiting room. Members of the Klan attacked us and left us lying in a pool of blood."

When the white men began assaulting John Lewis, Bigelow stepped between him and his attackers, trying to protect Lewis, but the mob started beating Bigelow, pounding him to the floor.

Bigelow had been a U.S. Navy Commander in World War II, but then became a pacifist. In 1958, Bigelow sailed his four-man ship, The Golden Rule, into the atomic testing site in the South Pacific to disrupt U.S. nuclear weapons tests in the Marshall Islands.

After Lewis and Bigelow were beaten to the ground and bloodied, the police arrived and asked if they wanted to press charges. "We said, 'No, we come with peace and love and nonviolence.' They left us bloodied. The Freedom Rides continued."

THE BURNING BUS

When their buses pulled into Anniston, Alabama, on May 14, a racist mob and the Ku Klux Klan attacked the Greyhound bus, slashed its tires, then firebombed it a few miles outside of town, and then began beating the Freedom Riders as they escaped the burning bus.

Shortly after that first bus was burned, the second bus arrived in Anniston, and Klansmen boarded it and brutally beat the Freedom Riders. Walter Bergman, age 61, was beaten nearly to death and repeatedly kicked in the head, causing permanent brain damage. He soon suffered a severe stroke that left him paralyzed and in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

As nightmarish as this violence was, the Freedom Rides were a trailblazing achievement on the road to liberation. The entire nation witnessed the unbelievable courage of the Freedom Riders, and became more aware of the deadly levels of brutality and hatred being used to preserve the system of racism and segregation.

When Lewis was describing for us the way he and Bigelow refused to press charges against their assailants, I was stunned to hear how a 21-year-old man found the forgiveness to say, "We come with peace and love and nonviolence."

Yet, this story has an even more unforgettable ending. In February of 2009, one of the Klan members who had taken part in the beating of Lewis and Bigelow came to visit Rep. Lewis in his Washington office. Elwin Wilson was now in his 70s, and he came with his son, in his 40s.

The cover art of *March: Book Two* depicts John Lewis speaking at the massive March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, when he was 25.

As Lewis recalled the visit, the man said to him, "Mr. Lewis, I'm one of the people that attacked you and your seatmate. I want to apologize. Will you forgive me?"

I said, "Yes, I accept your apology. Yes, I forgive you."

"He started crying. His son started crying. They hugged me. I hugged them back. And I started crying."

Lewis said he visited with "this gentleman" three other times.

THE WAY OF LOVE

I was astonished by his ability to forgive. And then John Lewis told us what this encounter truly meant, and what the spirit of nonviolence was all about.

Lewis said, "That is the power of the way of peace, the power of the way of love, the power of the way of nonviolence — to be reconciled. In the final analysis, we are one people. We are one family. We all live in the same house — not just the American house, but the world house."

This lesson was given to us by a man who had lived through a lifetime of segregation and cruel mistreatment, who endured many beatings from violent mobs and unjust jail sentences at the hands of racist police. A man who saw buses burning, who endured the hellish conditions of Mississippi's infamous state penitentiary, Parchman Farm, and who was part of a movement where too many friends and ministers and activists and Sunday School students were murdered and martyred.

It is horrible what this nation allowed to happen to idealistic young people who gave so much of themselves — sometimes even their very lives — in the struggle for freedom and equality. It is a terrible crime that our nation has never fully atoned for.

A VISION OF HOPE

Yet, Lewis ended his presentation in San Francisco with a shining vision of hope about creating the beloved community.

He said, "I must tell you tonight that in spite of 40 arrests, jailings, and being beaten and left bloody not only in Rock Hill, South Carolina, but at the Greyhound bus station in Montgomery where I was hit in the head by a member of an angry mob with a wooden Coca Cola crate, I am still hopeful, still optimistic.

"We must never, ever give up. We must never, ever give in. We must never get lost in a sea of despair. We must keep the faith. I'm not going to turn back. And you must not turn back. You must not give up. You must not give in. We can create the beloved community here in America."

Those who were able to listen to John Lewis in San Francisco were amazed and illuminated by his spirit. One of the most radical champions of civil rights, one of the strongest fighters from the movement days of the 1960s, is also one of our most eloquent defenders of love and peace.

His last words that night shine like the stars. They should be engraved as a living legacy on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. John Lewis said, "You must continue to spread the good news, the way of love, the way of peace, the way of nonviolence."

Berkeley Takes Action on Police Abuse

from page 6

investigation has its own conflicts of interest as a group which now operates primarily in secret because of the Copley decision, a state law arguing that investigations of police are private personnel matters.

The Berkeley Police Department initially denied a public records act information request from Copwatch's Andrea Pritchett, then responded to a second request with a comically redacted document resembling a Mondrian painting without the color. But the long wait of more than 20 years since the last organized effort to change controversial police tactics has not discouraged those who know that policy change is not just possible — for communities of color, it is crucial.

Jim Chanin, one of the original founders of Berkeley's Police Review Commission, spoke to the City Council in favor of the moratorium, pointing out that San Francisco police don't use CS gas or projectiles as crowd control. "This is the only city where testimony like this is happening," he said, noting that on April 28, 1992, the Berkeley City Council passed a law requiring that "BPD take direct supervisory responsibility over mutual aid," and that "prior to deployment in the field BPD advise mutual aid units that they are required to comply" with Berkeley policy.

Chanin finished his testimony by noting that Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates had at one time questioned why the Berkeley police would even have an application for an armored vehicle.

George Lippman of the Peace and Justice Commission and the Police Review Commission pointed out that "another flare-up could happen at any time... What we really want to do is prevent these situations."

Long-time community activist and former Councilmember Ying Lee Kelly stated, "Non African Americans do not experience what African Americans experience ... I can't believe that my City Council would allow this kind of behavior."

Berkeley Councilmember Max Anderson specifically thanked the Black Student Unions at UC Berkeley, Berkeley High School, and Berkeley City College who joined together to organize a peaceful march to the council meeting with ringing words of support. "You are part of a continuum," Anderson said. "Tyranny will flourish if it's not unchecked. We have sent treasury and troops around the world ... saying no government should oppress its own people ... Yes, black lives matter."

At the City Council meeting on February 24, two weeks later, Anderson wrestled even more police restrictions with stronger language from the council, calling for an examination and analysis of the Drug Task Force, banning the "four-way search clause" allowing even public searches at any time or place without probable cause or warrant, banning the handcuffing of citizens prior to arrest, recommending a public safety model that doesn't rely on militaristic tools and techniques, recommending a restoration of mental health funding "on an urgent basis," and calling for the creation of an inclusive community task force to promote police accountability and civilian oversight.

Even initially dubious members of the City Council seemed to recognize what the crowd clarified a second time with riveting testimony: namely, that police tactics in the historically black parts of Berkeley are dramatically different than in other parts of town and disproportionately impact poor people, people of color, and people struggling with mental illness.

Anderson was clear that the weaknesses in earlier proposals had inspired his effort to address what so many citizens illustrated with chilling personal stories. As the local president of the NAACP, Mansour Id-Deen, put it, "It's almost as if there's two separate Berkeleys."

"I drafted this language because the language in the packet on the agenda was not adequate," Anderson said. "When we go to seek out remedies we need to go deeper." He added, "The low-lying fruit is politically easy, fiscally easy, and socially easy. The Police Review Commission has to be restored to its proper place."

Editor: After attending the City Council hearings, reporter Carol Denney wrote, "I am so glad I went to the meeting, a feeling I almost never have! It was like seeing a tidal wave of moral strength rise in the room."

The Genesis of Street Spirit in a Seminary

by Terry Messman

Recently, I returned to the Pacific School of Religion (PSR) to attend the inaugural ceremony for the seminary's new president, Rev. David Vásquez-Levy, and to receive the Distinguished Alumni award. I hadn't returned to PSR since I graduated 30 years ago, and as the memories came back, I realized that the course of my life was changed dramatically in those intense years in the Berkeley seminary.

I've never told the story of *Street Spirit's* origins before, but looking back now, I can clearly see that its birthplace was in the Protestant and Catholic seminaries of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) where I studied systematic theology, liberation theology, and the peacemakers and prophets of diverse spiritual traditions.

I entered Pacific School of Religion in 1981 on a fellowship from the North American Theological Fund that I was awarded while serving two six-month sentences in federal prison in the Mojave Desert for acts of anti-nuclear resistance. I had been arrested with a Lutheran minister, Rev. John Lemnitzer, at Malmstrom Air Force Base, and arrested again at Bangor Naval Base with Catholic theologian and peace activist James Douglass.

Now, 30 years later, on Jan. 29, 2015, at the inauguration of the seminary's new president, I found that the spirit of justice lives on at PSR. Rev. David Vásquez-Levy is one of only four persons of Latino descent serving as president of an accredited seminary in the United States.

Rev. Vásquez-Levy helped to provide food, housing and legal assistance to the victims of the Postville Raid in 2008, the largest single raid of a U.S. workplace where Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested nearly 400 immigrant workers at the meatpacking plant in Postville, Iowa. Rev. Vásquez-Levy became a leading voice in advocating for more humane immigration polices.

In another sign of justice at PSR, many seminary students were arrested in Berkeley on Dec. 8, 2014, after joining a die-in and march in protest of the grand jury decisions in the police killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner.

They issued "an open letter to communities of faith" and declared that "disruptive action" is needed to "dismantle the systems of racial injustice that create the world in which Michael Brown, Eric Garner and countless others are killed with impunity." Several clergy and professors at PSR and GTU spoke out in favor of their nonviolent resistance.

Members of Spirit chain themselves to an MX model at Livermore Lab on Good Friday. The author is lying on the missile.

The police ordered huge earthmoving machinery to slam into the missile while members of Spirit were still chained to it.

Arrests of Seminarians

This faculty support of their protest reminded me how important that kind of support had been to Spirit affinity group when we organized acts of civil disobedience that resulted in the arrests of seminarians at Livermore Lab in the 1980s.

At first, the arrests of scores of priests and ministers-in-training was controversial. Yet, after three years of resistance that saw large numbers of seminarians arrested at the nuclear weapons lab, Father Michael Blecker, O.S.B., the president of the GTU from 1982-1987, spoke out in the *Daily Californian,* saying that he was proud of all the seminarians who had been arrested for taking a stand for peace.

Spirit affinity group had been formed during a nonviolence training Darla Rucker and I held at the Dominican seminary on Holy Hill, and quickly grew into a community of activists who lived, breathed, dreamed and prayed nonviolent resistance to the war machine. Spirit members Darla Rucker, Ken Butigan, Patti Runo, Bruce Turner, Rick Cotton, Jim Bridges and I were arrested many times at Livermore Laboratory, Concord Naval Weapons Station, the Federal Building and the Salvadoran consulate in San Francisco.

The Path to Peacemaking

I had started out on the path to peacemaking when I was arrested repeatedly as a journalism student for acts of trespass at Malmstrom Air Force Base in protest of nuclear missiles; followed by arrests at Rocky Flats in Colorado where all the nation's plutonium triggers were made; and a risk-filled trespass into the high-security zone of the Bangor Naval Base in Washington where Marines were authorized to use lethal force as they guarded the bunkers that stored nuclear warheads.

After I was tried and sentenced to two six-month sentences in federal prison, Rev. Lynne Fitch, a Disciples of Christ minister and university professor, changed my entire life by encouraging me to attend seminary to build a foundation to support a lifetime of peace activism.

After spending several months in prison, I came to Pacific School of Religion in 1981. When asked what kind of ministry I was pursuing, I replied, "working for peace and justice." Some reacted in disbelief at this career path, as if I had said I was going to spend my life chasing unicorns.

Yet, the PSR administration offered genuine support for my seemingly quixotic path. One of PSR's strengths is that, even as it prepares hundreds of students for the ordained ministry in several mainline denominations, it also supports students who follow their conscience and develop alternative forms of ministry. I found that both Methodist ministers-in-training and impractical dreamers battling windmills can find support at PSR.

Engraved Forever

Many theologians I studied in seminary changed my life immeasurably. Their insights flashed like lightning in my mind and remain engraved in my soul to this day.

I studied *The Cost of Discipleship* by the great Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a student of Gandhian nonviolence who was executed in a concentration camp for his resistance to Nazi Germany. I was greatly inspired by *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution* by Andre Trocme, a courageous French pastor who provided safe haven for thousands of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany.

I became immersed in the works of Thomas Merton, a contemplative monk who became one of the most prophetic voices against the Vietnam War and nuclear weapons. Merton wrote: "A theology of love may also conceivably turn out to be a theology of revolution. In any case, it is a theology of RESISTANCE, a refusal of the evil that reduces a brother or sister to homicidal desperation."

After all these years, Daniel Berrigan, a priest, poet and "peace criminal," is still one of the most important role models in my life. I named my son Daniel after him. Berrigan wrote: "We have chosen to be powerless criminals in a time of criminal power. We have chosen to be branded as peace criminals by war criminals."

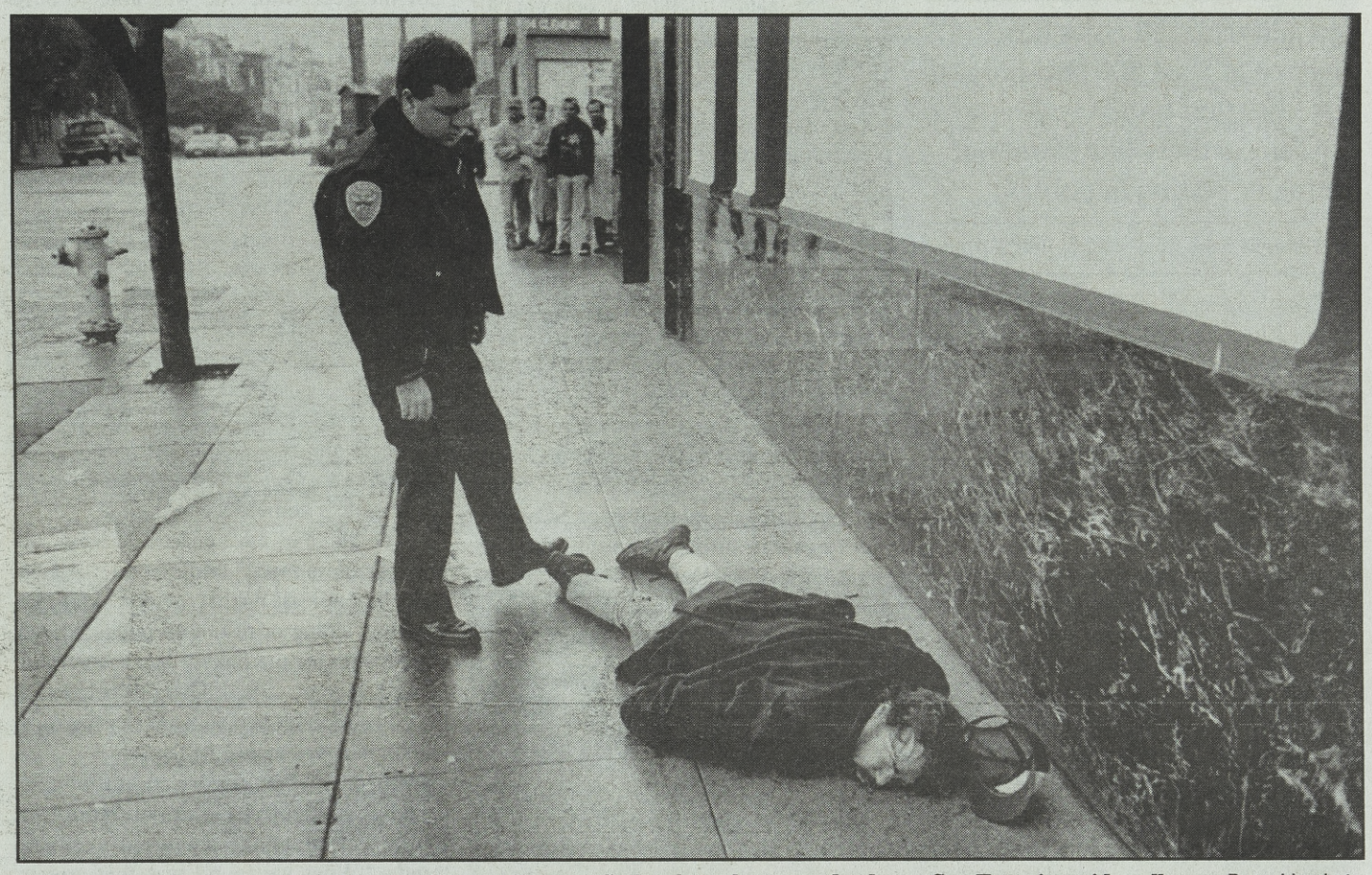
Archbishop Oscar Romero, murdered after telling the armed forces of El Salvador to stop slaughtering their own people, declared: "The cry for liberation of this people is a shout that rises up to God and that nothing and no one can now stop."

Gustavo Gutierrez, a Dominican priest and founder of liberation theology, devoted his life to overcoming the oppression of the poor. He wrote: "It used to be called mercy, then charity, then commitment; today it is called solidarity. To give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, shelter to the homeless, and to welcome the stranger are actions so basic that at the end of time we shall have to render an account of them."

See **The Genesis of Street Spirit** *page 10*

They Left Him to Die Like a Tramp on the Street

by Terry Messman



In Dong Lin's book, *One American Reality*, a policeman finds a homeless man dead on a San Francisco sidewalk. Dong Lin photo

One simple song — a country spiritual first performed by Hank Williams and later by Joan Baez — may have had a more lasting impact on my life than all the theologians and scholars I studied in seminary in Berkeley.

The seven seminaries of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) taught the newly arising forms of liberation theology from all over the world. In El Salvador and Guatemala, Brazil and Argentina, the Philippines and South Africa, people of faith were standing in solidarity with the poorest of the poor and courageously working for political and economic liberation.

When I took PSR Professor Robert McAfee Brown's course in liberation theology, I saw clearly, with new eyes, that there was an entire unseen world of poverty and oppression all around us — even around the seminaries on Berkeley's Holy Hill. Yet few activists paid any attention to the poverty and injustice so close to home.

The Long Loneliness

On the streets all around us, multitudes were suffering from hunger, illness and homelessness — suffering, too, from profound loneliness and isolation, abandoned by a society that treated poor people as outcasts and pariahs. *The long loneliness.*

Several times, while I was working in the Graduate Theological Union library, well-dressed graduate students would sneer in distaste at the presence of homeless people and demand that they be removed from the library as a blight and nuisance. I realized that nothing less than a Biblical parable was happening right before my eyes — an unsettling reminder of the parable of Lazarus who begged in vain for food at the rich man's gate *(Luke* 16: 19-31).

In my first year at seminary, I read *The Long Loneliness,* Dorothy Day's memoir of founding the Catholic Worker in response to hunger and injustice. So, that summer, shortly after Darla Rucker and I were arrested with other Spirit affinity group members in the massive June 1982 demonstration at Livermore Lab, we traveled to Los Angeles to volunteer at the Catholic Worker.

I was staggered when I saw the vast scale of hunger, poverty and human misery on Skid Row. For several decades, the Los Angeles Catholic Worker had provided meals, health care and shelter for an enormous number of desperately poor people.

Shortly after we arrived, the community celebrated the birthday of one of the Catholic Workers by bringing out a cake with a frosting inscription: "If you want peace, work for justice." That has now become a timeworn slogan, but I was haunted by that simple phrase.

Members of the Catholic Worker often were arrested for acts of nonviolent resistance to war and nuclear weapons. Yet, they spent 90 percent of their working hours providing meals, clothing and health care to poor people. That was a deep challenge to my own values and priorities.

Singing in a Strange Land

Every day, they served meals to hundreds of destitute people at their kitchen on Skid Row. And every day, they sang.

Their singing raised in my mind the question from *Psalm* 137: *"How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"* Skid Row truly was a strange and oppressive land where thousands of people were locked in captivity by merciless, grinding poverty. Yet, the Catholic Workers sang. I never got over that — the songs they sang in the midst of terrible hardships.

One song I learned that summer changed my life forever. "The Tramp on the Street" is a country spiritual written by Grady and Hazel Cole, first sung by the legendary Hank Williams and later by folksinger Joan Baez.

The song is based on a parable by Jesus about a poor man who asks for food at the rich man's gate — the same parable that had come involuntarily to mind when well-heeled graduate students had complained about the homeless people at the gates of the Graduate Theological Union.

"The Tramp on the Street" made an everlasting impression. I was stunned by its power. For years, I was unable to get the song out of my head, and I still need to hear it to this day. The lyrics just floored me the very first time I heard it.

"Only a tramp was Lazarus who begged,
He who laid down by the rich man's gate.
He begged for crumbs
from the rich man to eat.
But they left him to die
like a tramp on the street."

It was devastating to hear the song on Skid Row. The lyrics exploded inside like a depth charge, exposing the way the richest nation on earth had abandoned millions of homeless people, and then, by refusing to take action to alleviate their poverty, had condemned them to die "like a tramp on the street."

Yet, if the first verse was overwhelming, the next verse was heartbreaking. It still gets to me every time I hear the song, because it brings out the full human dimensions of the tragedy that takes place every single time a life is lost on the street.

At first glance, the lyrics may sound sentimental. They are not. Every parent knows they tell the truth with uncompromising emotional honesty. Every parent feels the same tenderness and protectiveness towards their child, and the song beautifully expresses the depth of a mother's love.

"He was some mother's darling,
He was some mother's son.
Once he was fair, once he was young.
His mother rocked him,
her little darling to sleep.
But they left him to die
like a tramp on the street."

The song was a revelation. Every single person on the street was once some mother's darling son or precious daughter. No matter what the cruel years on the streets may have done, he was once fair and young, and he was loved beyond the telling.

The mother in this song cannot see into the future, when the darling son she is rocking will end up a homeless man, shunned in life and abandoned to an early death. The song's stinging impact derives precisely from its double vision. It sees a mother tenderly caring for her child, and at the same time, it sees into the future with piercing clarity, and knows that her child's life will end in tragedy.

Defaced and Disfigured

This man, once so fair and so young, will be defaced and disfigured by the hardships of life on the street. A person made in the image of God will be desecrated. And a society will refuse to care.

The song somehow ended all those useless and unfair questions about who is to be classified as the "worthy poor" or the "undeserving poor." Those are not the right questions, and they never were. The only question is: What is our human response when some mother's son or daughter ends up dying on the street?

Songwriters Grady and Hazel Cole still have one more insight to share, the exact same insight I had discovered in the works of Gustavo Gutierrez, Jose Miguez Bonino, Leonardo Boff and the other liberation theologians I was studying.

Once, long ago, another child was greatly loved by his parents, only to die like a tramp on the street. With unflinching honesty, this song describes how a parent's love turned into bitter tragedy.

"They pierced his sides,
his hands and his feet.
And they left him to die
like a tramp on the street."

The song describes the execution of Jesus at the hands of the Roman Empire in terms that link his death to the deaths of every mother's child on the streets of modern America. In truth, it is the same death. "As you do it to the least of these..."

"Mary she rocked him,
her little darling to sleep,
but they left him to die
like a tramp on the street."

The song has alternate endings, depending on the singer. Both endings are highly meaningful. In Joan Baez's version, one of the pre-eminent voices of the peace movement sings out in sorrow for the poor man's son killed in battle while an unthinking nation glories in its patriotic triumph. It is one of Baez's finest moments.

"Red, white and blue, and victory sweet,
But they left him to die
like a tramp on the street."

The original ending by Hank Williams is a disquieting warning that some have rejected angels unaware. Jesus was homeless too, so who is that Stranger we turn away from our door?

"If Jesus should come and
knock on your door,
For a place to lie down
or bread from your store,
Would you welcome him in
or turn him away?"

This same insight into the nature of human solidarity has deeply affected the thinking of liberation theologians in Latin America. We are all one body. Those who are crushed or crucified by poverty are part of the Body of Christ, and their lives are no less sacred than the man who died a criminal's death 2,000 years ago.

Tom Joad's 'One Big Soul'

Woody Guthrie perfectly captured the secular equivalent of this vision of solidarity in "Tom Joad," a song inspired by John Steinbeck's novel, *The Grapes of Wrath,* about the struggles of Dust Bowl refugees.

In Guthrie's magnificent song, Tom Joad and Preacher Casey come to see that all people share "one big soul." They realize that they are inseparably linked to all the poor and hungry children, and to all the people fighting for their rights.

As Tom Joad flees the deputies and the law, this is how he describes his vision of "one big soul" to his mother.

"Everybody might be just one big soul
Well it looks that'a way to me.
Everywhere you look in the day or night,
That's where I'm gonna be, Ma,
That's where I'm gonna be.
Wherever little children are hungry and cry
Wherever people ain't free,
Wherever men are fighting for their rights
That's where I'm gonna be, Ma.
That's where I'm gonna be."

That summer when I first heard "The Tramp on the Street," I had been listening to Country Joe McDonald's beautiful rendition of "Tom Joad" on his masterpiece album, "Thinking of Woody Guthrie." Both songs felt like chapters in the same saga of parents and children torn apart by poverty and hunger on the streets of America.

Both songs expressed the same revelation about the human condition: Life is sacred and it is not just some economic statistic when someone hungers and suffers and dies on the streets of our nation.

It is some mother's son, some mother's daughter. It is a human being made in the image of God. It is a desecration of the sacred when that life is torn down.

California's New Vagrancy Laws

In California, 58 cities have enacted at least 500 anti-homeless laws that ban at least one daytime activity like standing, sitting or resting in public.

from page 1

From the capitol steps, St. Mary's Senior Advocate Angel McClain told how getting arrested for being homeless prevented her from securing permanent housing. "When I was out there (homeless), we walked the streets all day and all night. We had nowhere where we could sit in peace and rest. If you sit down, the police would harass you and you would have to move.

"I was arrested several times just because I was homeless. I had been putting in applications for a place to live, and unfortunately from my arrest record and not having money or anywhere to live, it showed up on my credit report. I had an interview for an apartment, and do you want to know why I was denied? I was denied because I owe court costs for being arrested for no apparent reason."

The press conference was held to release a new report from the UC Berkeley Policy Advocacy Clinic, "California's New Vagrancy Laws: The Growing Enactment and Enforcement of Anti-Homeless Laws in the Golden State." UC Berkeley Law Professor Jeffrey Selbin, director of the Policy Advocacy Clinic, described how the report carefully gathered impartial evidence about laws that affect homeless people.

"Last year, WRAP asked us to research the increasing criminalization of homeless people in California," Selbin said. "The voices of advocates and the voices of homeless people are often ignored or dismissed and WRAP wanted evidence-based research to confirm or refute their experience on the ground.... We did not presume that the advocate's story was the accurate one.... We really looked for hard evidence and data."

The report examined today's anti-homeless laws and found many similarities to the discriminatory ordinances of past decades when laws were used to enforce racial discrimination and exclude disabled people and migrants.

"The first thing that stood out to us," he said, "is that anti-homeless laws today and the vagrancy laws of prior eras — restrictions like anti-Okie laws, the Sundown Towns and Ugly Laws that explicitly discriminated against migrants, people of color and people with physical disabilities — have come back and they've come back with a vengeance. They are designed to keep people out, to push people out."

Selbin explained that in the 1970s, the U.S. Supreme Court declared these laws unconstitutional. The Supreme Court declared that the old vagrancy laws encouraged arbitrary arrests and criminalized innocent activities and placed unfettered discretion at the hands of the police. "These laws have come back and are used primarily to target homeless people," he said.

WRAP Executive Director Paul Boden supported the report's findings with a historical perspective. "The federal government eliminated the equivalent of 54 billion dollars a year in affordable housing funding from 1979 to 1982," he said, "which resulted in opening our emergency shelter programs in 1983. Then we are talking about a violation of people's human rights. The response to that level of homelessness was the criminalization of people that are living without housing!"

Right to Rest advocate Russell Bartholow passionately described how he survived 15 long years on the streets with the added trauma and hardship caused by police harassment and repeated incarcerations. "I was arrested continuously for selling flowers by the side of the road," he said.

Bartholow said he tried many times to apply for public benefits but could not get to his appointments because he was constantly being detained or arrested. "I was arrested for vending, soliciting, soliciting within 500 feet of the freeway, sleeping.... I've been arrested hundreds of times. In 15 years, that adds up."

Beside the freeway where he lived, Bartholow had grown a garden to help feed himself and his friends. "They came in and poisoned it with herbicide, destroyed it," he said. "We would eat it, scrape it clean, which gave me cancer from the herbicide." Deathly ill, he was put in the hospital where he saw a homeless rights article with his niece's name on it: Jessica Bartholow. With his niece's help, Russell Bartholow is now receiving benefits, and has been housed for 18 months without one incident of incarceration.

Russell's niece, Jessica Bartholow, is a legislative advocate for California's Western Center on Law and Poverty and has worked for nearly 15 years to overcome the harm that low-income Californians face due to a shredded safety net. During one of the legislative visits that the advocates attended, Jessica shared that what Russell needed was real help, not incarceration. She was able to help him get his benefits in three months.

But the repercussions of the criminalization continue for Bartholow. Over the years, he has accumulated an obscene amount of court fines. "You're not going to believe the amount of fines, millions of dollars," he said. "I went in front of the judge, and he said, 'Alright, you need to just make payments.' I told him if I could pay three-and-one-half million dollars in fines I wouldn't be out there panhandling."

Nathaniel Miller, co-author of the California Vagrancy Laws report and UC Berkeley Policy Advocacy Clinic law student said the report studied 58 cities in California that are home to three-quarters of the state's homeless population.

"The 58 cities have enacted at least 500 anti-homeless laws," Miller said. "All 58 cities ban at least one daytime activity like standing, sitting or resting in public." Even compassion for the hungry has been criminalized in some cities. "Over 20 percent of the cities prohibit people from sharing food with homeless people," Miller said.

Marina Fisher, report co-author and graduate student at Goldman School of Public Policy, spoke about enforcement trends. "What we found was that arrests for so-called vagrancy crimes tend to follow economic cycles," Fisher said. "Specifically, they increase several years after the onset of a recession and in the wake of the great recession, vagrancy arrests continue to rise to the present day."

Their research showed that vagrancy arrests have risen by nearly 80 percent since 2000, but arrests for drunkenness and disorderly conduct have declined somewhat. "So what we see increasingly is a pattern of arresting and criminalizing people for their status, not for specific behavior like drunkenness or disorderly conduct," Fisher said. "These laws perpetuate poverty, and enforcement is very expensive."

Lindsay Walter, a UCB law student and report co-author, said that the report's first recommendation is to seek a solution to the increased criminalization at the level of state government, with the Right to Rest Act being a first step.

The second recommendation is to improve data collection and reporting. "None of the cities that we researched tracked enforcement against homeless people specifically, and none record the housing status of those they are citing or arresting," Walter said.

The third recommendation is for organizations to work together and pool resources. "Other law schools around the country are taking an interest in our report and are going to conduct similar research in their state," Walter said. "And other states are taking a lead at the statewide level. Colorado and Oregon already have Right to Rest Bills that have been introduced. It is time for California to step up and join in leading this cause!"

"We can't arrest our way out of homelessness," said Eric Ares, a community organizer from the L.A. Community Action Network. "The ultimate solution to ending homelessness is housing, but until we do that, we cannot continue this horrible cycle which is morally bankrupt and only perpetuates the cycle of homelessness. It makes it harder to find housing if you have citations, arrests, warrants."

In his closing remarks at the press conference, Ares said, "We are asking for political leadership and political will."

We need political will and People Power to pass the WRAP Right to Rest Act in California. We need to support and participate and donate to the movement to pass a California Right to Rest Act.

Download a free copy of the UC Policy Advocacy Clinic's new report "California's New Vagrancy Laws" at www.wraphome.org

The Right to Rest Act Introduced as SB 608 in the State Senate

In a breakthrough for the human rights of homeless people in California, State Senator Carol Liu (D – La Cañada Flintridge) introduced the Right to Rest Act (SB 608) to the State Senate on Feb. 27, 2015.

This legislation was developed by the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) in order to end the alarming trend of cities passing laws that criminalize homeless people and violate their civil rights. SB 608, the Right to Rest Act, would protect the rights of homeless people to move freely, rest, eat, and perform religious observations in public space as well as protect their right to occupy a legally parked motor vehicle.

"It's time to address poverty, mental health, and the plight of the homeless head-on as a social issue and not a criminal issue," said Liu. "Citing homeless people for resting in a public space can lead to their rejection for jobs, education loans, and housing, further denying them a pathway out of poverty."

The Genesis of Street Spirit in a Seminary

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I endlessly read the works of Rev. Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders. I came to believe that the Freedom Movement is the most courageous and visionary campaign in our nation's history. It is also the most important model of how a human life should be lived. It continues to give me so much hope and light.

Turning Words into Action

In the light of those words, Spirit affinity group acted. We journeyed to Puget Sound and boarded small sailboats to block the launching of the first Trident submarine armed with enough first-strike nuclear warheads to obliterate hundreds of cities. As we began sailing into the path of the Trident sub, our fleet was attacked by nearly 100 U.S. Navy ships that rammed and battered our small boats, assaulted us with high-powered water cannons, boarded our small boats and pointed machine guns at us as they arrested us.

Members of Spirit journeyed to Nicaragua on Witness for Peace delegations to stand in solidarity with the impoverished people of that embattled land who were targeted by the U.S.-backed Contras.

In 1982 and 1983, Spirit affinity group founded the Good Friday protests at Livermore Laboratory. We carried a huge model of an MX Missile weighing several hundred pounds to the busy intersection leading into Livermore Lab, dropped it in the center of the road, chained our bodies to the missile, and threw the keys away.

We blocked the roads into the holocaust laboratory for hours until the police pulled up with giant earth-moving machinery. They directed the driver of the machine to slam into the rear of the MX while we were still chained to it. Father Bill O'Donnell of St. Joseph the Worker in Berkeley, a priest who had joined with Spirit on many acts of resistance, warned the driver, "We are chained to this missile. If you use that machine, you will crush us."

After a long stand-off while countless cars carrying nuclear lab workers were prevented from entering Livermore Lab, the police cut us loose from the missile with bolt-cutters, and violently arrested us. The police slammed my head into the pavement until I vomited blood and bile from the concussion they caused.

We served one-month jail sentences in Santa Rita Jail for our Good Friday protest. For theology students, a jail cell seemed the right place to be on Good Friday.

Spirit members were arrested nearly every month during the four years I attended seminary. When I graduated with a Master of Divinity degree from PSR in June 1985, I was not able to attend my own graduation, because I had just been shipped off to Lompoc Federal Prison after Ken Butigan, Marie Pastrick and I were arrested at the Federal Building in San Francisco for protesting the Reagan administration's war on Nicaragua.

After release from Lompoc, I began work with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) where I created the Homeless Organizing Project under the supervision of AFSC staff David Hartsough. I spent my first decade at AFSC organizing dozens of takeovers of abandoned houses in Oakland and protesting San Francisco's Matrix program.

In 1995, Sally Hindman, a fellow PSR graduate who was working with the homeless community, asked me to create a street newspaper to be sold by homeless people. Sally organized and directed the first *Street Spirit* vendor team and I became the editor and publisher.

It seemed fitting that this new direction of "justice journalism" should have originated from a fellow graduate of the Pacific School of Religion. After taking classes at PSR about prophets who cried out for justice for the oppressed, we co-founded a publication whose purpose is to give a voice to the poor and dispossessed.

I had entered seminary seeking a foundation for a lifetime of peace activism, but my entire life was turned upside down at the Pacific School of Religion. After being immersed for years in liberation theology, Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker movement and Martin Luther King's Poor People's Campaign, I knew I had to seek justice for poor and oppressed people. After graduating from PSR, I got involved in the homeless movement and never looked back.

As Gustavo Gutierrez wrote: "It used to be called mercy, then charity, then commitment; today it is called solidarity."

Terry Messman has been the editor of *Street Spirit* for 20 years. This is the first time in those two decades he has written a personal story or described the origins of *Street Spirit*.

Home Is Where The Heart Is

from page 1

and Oakland. One resident experienced their first drive-by shooting less than four days after they left the Bulb, and the outside of the building that they were placed in was pockmarked with bullet holes.

Another resident's daughter was robbed when she went to the corner store. That same household (the family was housed in Richmond) had the unpleasant experience of someone being murdered on the sidewalk directly outside their house.

Yet another household (also in Richmond) had a 30-person gang riot occur in the street, directly in front of their house. Not one police officer responded to the incident.

Now, we have "better lives"!?

Now, we are unhappy, unrested, unsettled, cornered, trapped, cramped, hungry, isolated, alienated, overweight and undernourished.

Regardless of any so-called "assistance" we received, we are unhelped. And now, helping ourselves is so much harder. And, with the members of our former community scattered between West Oakland and Central Richmond (some of us are scattered as far away as Portland, Oregon), helping each other is nearly impossible.

Some say the eviction "helped" us. We would most likely disagree with that assertion. But, what do we know? After all, we were at Home on a Landfill!

With the housing market as it is, and with the City of Albany devoting so much more money and effort towards prosecuting former Bulb residents than it has ever spent on affordable housing, it comes as no surprise that virtually all of us who lived for years in Albany on the Bulb have now moved to other nearby cities.

PERSECUTED ON THE STREETS

Those of us who still live on the streets are under constant persecution due to the inhumane laws and ordinances that effectively criminalize our very existence.

In Albany, one must acquire a special permit to park an oversized vehicle (which must be registered to an Albany address) on any city street. Even then, that vehicle can only park in one spot for up to 72 hours. Berkeley and Richmond also have ordinances against parking a vehicle in one spot for more than 72 hours. Every city in the area has laws against "camping."

Despite the growing occurrence of poverty, the "commons" is hardly for the common people. Maybe it should be renamed the "privileges"?

While roughly half of us remain "homeless," there are many of us (even those who live indoors) who long for our homes out on the Albany Bulb.

It is heartbreaking to go out to the Bulb and see what has been done to our former home. Now that nobody lives there, trash receptacles have been installed, as have dispensers with bags for people to pick up after their dogs. Every improvement that we made to the land has been left in place (more cost-effective for the City and the Parks District, to whom they are trying to transfer the land). Paths have been widened and turned into roads that vehicles now travel upon.

The beloved "Wild Art" of the Bulb is slowly being removed as "graffiti." Soon, only the sculptures will remain (if that).

The City of Albany, whose police officers originally suggested that people with nowhere else to live should live on the Albany Bulb, is effectively trying to erase nearly all evidence of our community having ever existed.

However, two projects which were started while we still lived out on the Bulb, now aim to preserve the memory of our community and the land while it was still under our care.

In April 2014, bulldozers squashed the homes and lives of over 60 residents living at the Albany Bulb. Robin Lasser photo

1. "Refuge in Refuse: A Homesteading, Art and Culture Project" by San Jose State University's Robin Lasser can be seen at www.refugeinrefuse.weebly.com

2. "The Atlas of the Albany Bulb" by UC Berkeley's Susan Moffat can be seen at www.albanybulbatlas.org

Both projects can be seen and interacted with at San Francisco's SOMArts through March 12, 2015. [See "The Sense of Loss When a Community Is Erased" by Elena Gross on page 4 of this issue.]

There is something at once encouraging and frustrating about the acknowledgement and acclaim that is finally being given to our now-nonexistent community and dwellings.

Where were these masters of academia when we were trying to alert the public at large about our impending displacement?

Why were they silent at City Council meetings when Bulb residents and our supporters and advocates were begging for humane treatment and justice?

Why is it not part of the curriculum for students (with the exception of law students, to whom we owe much of the credit for what little success we had in the lawsuit to defend our dignity) to take on the role of activists and to fight for the rights of the poor and the persecuted?

I could speculate: How can one tell a conclusive story that yet has no end? How could one study the archeology of a "past people," if that people still currently exists?

It was a strange and bittersweet experience for those of us who managed to attend the opening night of "Refuge in Refuse: Homesteading, Art and Culture Project" on February 12.

That evening, I rode to San Francisco in a van with eight of my former neighbors and Osha Neumann, a civil rights lawyer, Bulb artist and like family to anyone who has ever called the Albany Bulb their "Home." I was thrilled to be seated next to Mom-a-Bear! When we all lived on the Bulb, she was one of my favorite people to hang out with. But, since our eviction, I have seen her only a handful of times.

When we arrived, a few of us stopped short of going inside the gallery immediately. Instead, we paused to smoke cigarettes and breathe some fresh air after the van ride across the Bay. While we were out there, we got to greet our former neighbors as they arrived.

We met and hugged and shook the hands of our friends' family members. Many of us heard the words, "It's so nice to finally meet you! I have heard so much about you!"

When we went inside, what greeted us was essentially a room full of bite-size pieces of our former lives, displayed with the necessary blank white spaces in between and put into an easily digestible format for the public to enjoy.

Many of us compared the exhibit to a postmortem of our community that showed people what certain features of our lives looked like, so that they can feel sympathy and feel as though they want to take some action to save our community.

Tamara, Emmy and Mom-A-Bear sitting on Greg Kloehn's "Mobile Homes for the Homeless." Photo by Barbara Boissevain

A community that doesn't even exist anymore.

One of the most positive things to result from the recent exhibit is the opening up of people's minds to the fact that we were a community of human beings, uprooted and evicted.

We were scattered to the wind, our peaceful lives sent spinning in upheaval. Traumatized and left to find our way without the stability that we had long enjoyed in our homes on the Albany Bulb (some of us, for over 20 years).

In my ongoing activism for the Bulb and its refugees, sometimes I get asked what people can do to help.

Honestly, it is too late to "help" something that has already been destroyed.

However, there are causes that people can get involved in which aim to prevent future devastation from happening to other people and communities.

Write to your local government representatives. Tell them that you support the passing of a Homeless Bill of Rights and a Right to Rest Act. No city in this state should be allowed to criminalize the existence of people because they are deemed too poor or unsightly for the rest of the public to know about.

As for any opportunity to interact with the former residents of the Albany Bulb?

On April 25, 2015, a contingent of former residents plans to converge on the Bulb. Many residents were barred from setting foot on ANY "open space" in Albany for one year. April 25th marks the end of their "stay away order."

There is a Facebook page that is maintained by former Bulb residents and their supporters: www.facebook.com/sharethebulb.

Hopefully, some day, people who have virtually nothing will be allowed to keep what little they have — instead of having it destroyed in the name of "progress."

Oakstop Gallery Displays "Black Artists on Art"

Trevor Parham, the director of Oakstop Gallery in Oakland. Lydia Gans photo

Leon Kennedy's painting, "The Three Wise Men," is on display at Oakstop Gallery.

by Lydia Gans

"Black Artists on Art: The Legacy Exhibit" is a wide-ranging exhibition of the work of three generations of Black artists now on display until March 28 at Oakstop Gallery at 1701 Broadway in Oakland.

It provides a showcase for the work of 36 artists. Art lovers visiting the gallery will recognize some familiar names and be introduced to new talents.

Oakstop is a large space which opened just one year ago. Trevor Parham, 32, an art entrepreneuer, is the founder and director. He describes it as "a 10,000-square-foot mixed-use facility dedicated to shared workspace, events, meetings and the proliferation of local entrepreneurs and artists."

There are small rooms where people can meet or work individually, a large workroom, and the gallery. Artworks are on exhibit throughout the space, including in the halls and stairways.

Parham is a businessman as well as an artist. He is a man bursting with ideas and the energy to carry them out. Art is not just for hanging on walls, he maintains, but is used in all sorts of businesses, and he sees Oakstop as a place for artists to "grow Black artists and art as a business ... to make (sure that) the work that we do as Black artists in arts is sustainable."

Oakstop is located in downtown Oakland, a neighborhood seeing increasing artistic and cultural developments. Shared workspaces — Parham also uses the phrase coworking communities — are proliferating in the Bay Area. As membership in Oakstop increases, Parham will be acquiring more equipment and providing more resources and services, running more workshops and public events.

The "Black Artists on Art" exhibit was inspired by the publication of two volumes of *Black Artists on Art* by Samella Lewis. The first volume came out in 1969 and the second soon after. Dr. Lewis is a distinguished African American historian, artist, author and educator.

Seeing that works of Black artists were generally not represented in museums and galleries, she decided to make the images of them accessible to the public in the form of inexpensive books.

Parham and Samella Lewis's grandson, Unity Lewis, have collaborated on various projects over the years. One day, Lewis suggested that they work together to continue and expand his grandmother's *Black Artists on Art* book project.

Parham was enthusiastic at the idea of reviving the legacy of Samella Lewis and "going further from a perspective of figuring out how can we use some business practices in this and make this book project more relevant in the 21st century. How can we take *Black Artists on Art* and turn it into a larger brand, not just put out a book or two, but also use all these other new forms of media." The intention was to get more public exposure for these important forms of art. So when he started Oakstop a year ago, he established the gallery and mounted the Legacy Exhibit.

The title, "Black Artists on Art," expresses the deeper, underlying idea of both the book and the exhibit. The vision is to go beyond simply displaying works of art, and also having the artists articulate their reasons and intentions in creating art.

There are about 100 works by 36 artists accompanied by their statements describing what moves them to express themselves as they do — the emotional and intellectual activation they get from producing this art to share with others.

Artist Abba Yahuda writes: "Even though a great majority of the artists from the African Diaspora are heavily influenced by the traumatic effects of post-colonial oppression, many are drawing from a different more glorious past...."

For Karen Seneferu, "Claiming beauty or resurrecting beauty against a history of demoralizing constructions resists death, so, I create work that is both beautiful thus dangerous."

Kara Fortune explains, "I attempt to peel back the skins and layers of history and expose things that have been forgotten. Artists such as Charles White and John Outerbridge inspired me to create my own visual concepts."

Oakland artist Leon Kennedy was profiled in "The Visionary Folk Art of Leon Kennedy," in the April 2014 *Street Spirit*.

Kennedy wrote: "There is a need for what I am doing, a need for the truth and a need for people to be inspired. The world is filled with despair and people need some light. They need to know all the possibilities. That's what my art is about."

Trevor Parham and Unity Lewis also have works in the show. Parham writes, "We need to connect, We need to share. We need to build. We need to be artists so that we can be ourselves again."

Lewis explains, "One of my objectives is to preserve the cultural traditions of my ancestors that have been passed down to me through art. At the same time I am adding my own unique insight."

Parham describes the plans for the future. "In the same spirit as we were putting this exhibit together, we realized that, for whatever reason, many of the artists that we had relationships to were men." So with Black History month being followed by National Women's History month, he promises that "in March we're going to reconfigure the entire exhibit focused on Black women artists."

Beyond Nuclear Weapons, Beyond Empire, Beyond Racism

Remembering Dr. Martin Luther King's "Beyond Vietnam" speech given on April 4, 1967

At 7:00 a.m. on Good Friday, April 3, people concerned about the continuing development of nuclear weapons will gather at the corner of Vasco Road and Patterson Pass Road, outside Livermore Laboratory, for an interfaith prayer service followed by nonviolent acts of witness.

Our preacher will be Quaker David Hartsough, who met Dr. King during the Montgomery bus boycott in 1956 and who has been active in civil rights and the anti-nuclear movement since then.

From the corner we will walk to the gates of the Lab, pausing along the way to observe the Stations of the Cross where we will mourn the deaths of the people of color in our communities who have been killed by police and "security" forces. Some will block the gates, risking arrest.

A gathering of the community to share our work will follow at a nearby church. Light refreshments will be served.

The event is wheelchair accessible. Principal organizers are Ecumenical Peace Institute and Livermore Conversion Project. For more information visit www.epicalc.org or call 510-990-0374

Methodist Bishop Leontine Kelly arrested at Livermore Laboratory protest.